

State of Alaska

Department of Health & Social Services

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NEWS RELEASE



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Fact Sheet: 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)

What is the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)?

The YRBS was developed by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1990 to monitor priority health risk behaviors that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability, and social problems among youth and adults in the United States. These behaviors, often established during childhood and early adolescence, include:

- Tobacco use.
- Unhealthy dietary behaviors.
- Inadequate physical activity.
- Alcohol and other drug use.
- Sexual behaviors that contribute to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV infection.
- Behaviors that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence.

What are the purposes of the YRBS?

The YRBS was designed to:

- Determine the prevalence of health risk behaviors.
- Assess whether health risk behaviors increase, decrease, or stay the same over time.
- Examine the co-occurrence of health risk behaviors.
- Provide comparable national, state, and local data.
- Provide comparable data among subpopulations of youth.
- Monitor progress toward achieving the Healthy People 2010 objectives and other program indicators.

What did the 2003 YRBS find about youth tobacco use?

- 19% of high school students reported that they had smoked at least one cigarette in the past month, compared to 37% in 1995
- 8% of high school students reported that they used cigarettes on at least 20 days in the previous month, compared to 21% in 1995
- 56% of high school students reported that they had ever taken a single puff of a cigarette, compared to 72% in 1995
- Alaska Native youth have much higher rates of smoking than other races

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- 49% of Alaska Native females reported that they had smoked at least once during the previous month, compared to 12% of white females
- 40% of Alaska Native males reported that they had smoked at least once during the previous month, compared to 13% of white males
- Alaska Native youth begin smoking at younger ages than non-Native youth
- Alaska Native youth use smokeless tobacco more frequently than other youth.
 - 32% of Alaska Native males used smokeless tobacco, compared to 11% of white males
 - 18% of Alaska Native females used smokeless tobacco, compared to 3% of white females

What is Alaska's history with YRBS participation?

The YRBS high school survey was first implemented at the national level in 1990. Since that time CDC has sponsored national and state surveys in 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001 and most recently, in 2003.

Alaska first participated in the YRBS in 1995 and obtained weighted (representative) statewide data. Due to external factors, the YRBS was not administered in 1997. It was administered in 1999, however the 1999 sample did not include the Anchorage School District. Although the data were weighted, without Anchorage the data were not representative of the State as a whole. The survey was administered in 2001 with the participation of Anchorage. Unfortunately, low student response rates rendered the data unusable. A major obstacle in 2001 was the constraint of the active parental consent law that had just gone into effect. In 2003 the survey was administered statewide with active parental consent and weighted (representative) data were obtained. Thus, making this the first statewide YRBS representative sample since 1995.

How was the YRBS conducted?

A two-stage sample design was used to select the actual students for participation. The first stage consisted of selecting schools. Schools were selected with probability proportional to the size of their enrollment. Once a school was selected, classes were selected as the second stage. Eligible classes were those where a student would be enrolled in one and only one class at a time. For example second period or required English. This gave each student an equal opportunity of being selected. At any time a school district, an individual school, a student's parents, or a specific student had the opportunity to decline participation.

At the classroom level, teachers were given a script to read to students that established guidelines for student privacy and anonymity and the importance of the survey. Each student was given an unmarked envelope in which to seal his or her survey before turning it in. These survey envelopes remained sealed until received at a central state collection site. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Westat, Inc, a CDC contractor, analyzed the state survey data. Analysis included performance of extensive edit checks to identify survey inconsistencies.

At the same time that Alaska implemented the YRBS, a national YRBS was conducted at the high school level. However, the results of the National YRBS 2003 survey will not be available until early summer, so 2001 National YRBS results are being used for comparison purposes.

Who participated in the Survey?

The Alaska high school sample was drawn with a desired precision of ± 5 percent. The high school sample included 42 schools from 19 districts and sought 2,200 completed questionnaires. The overall response rate was 62%. Thirty-eight (90%) schools and 1,491 (68%) students participated. CDC has determined that for data to be "weighted", the school response rate (90%) multiplied by the student

response rate (68%) must equal 60% or greater. As stated above, the overall response rate was 62%, therefore; the high school survey results can be generalized to Alaska students in grades 9 – 12.

How are the data used?

The results of the YRBS are used to detect changes in risk behaviors over time and provide an important piece of program planning and evaluation, curriculum development and decision-making regarding the use of available resources. The information from the YRBS can be used to help schools and communities identify strengths and weaknesses in current programs and services. Additionally the results can be used by schools and communities when applying for grant funding to initiate or maintain programs that serve youth.

Who are our partners?

- Department of Education and Early Development
- Alaska School Districts
- Alaska Association of School Boards
- Alaska Tobacco and Control Alliance (ATCA)
- Parents and Students
- American Heart Association
- American Lung Association

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